



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
July 13, 2009
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, S. Fuhs, J. Waltman, V. Spencer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, C. Younger, D. Wright, A. Mukerji, C. Heminitz, A. Boscov

Mr. Spencer called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

I. Waive Bond for Hotel Project

Mr. Boscov stated that the hotel project is moving forward. He stated that currently Our City Reading is covering the expenses for the project. He stated the private investors hope that the hotel opens in 2011. Groundbreaking will occur in March 2010. He stated his belief that this project is a vital piece of the revitalization of Penn St. He requested that the bond for public infrastructure improvements be waived.

Mr. Mukerji explained that the bond is generally required to ensure the developers complete the project. He stated that Council has waived this requirement in the past for other projects and has recently waived this requirement for the Parking Authority in regard to the parking garage project. He stated that the groundbreaking for the garage will begin in August 2009.

Mr. Boscov stated that Governor Rendell has pledged additional funding for the hotel project.

Mr. Boscov reported that the Goggleworks Apartments project will begin in August 2009. He stated that there has been an excessive amount of paperwork involved in this project since HUD is providing funding.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the parking garage and hotel would be constructed at the same time. Mr. Boscov stated that they would not be as this is a small area. The garage will begin first to assist with the staging of materials.

II. Executive Session

Council entered executive session at 5:10 pm to discuss pending litigation. Council exited executive session at 5:39 pm.

III. Fee Increases

- Planning Fee Increases

Ms. Kelleher stated that she compared these fee increases to other local municipalities. She stated that the new fees will be very similar to surrounding municipalities.

Mr. Spencer noted that these are drastic increases.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how these new fees were determined. Ms. Kelleher stated that they are all cost based.

Mr. Sterner questioned what was involved in a parking lot review.

Mr. Waltman stated that the fee should not be \$900 for each additional ten spaces over 50.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the parking authority pays these fees. Ms. Kelleher stated that they do unless the City waives them. She stated that she was unsure if parking lots also need to pay all the SALDO fees.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that these fees must be weighed against the redevelopment needs of the City.

Mr. Wright stated that he would review these issues with Mr. Mayes and Mr. Miller and report back to Council.

Mr. Fuhs stated his belief that a firm did a thorough analysis and that Council should not question their recommendations. He stated that the recommendations of the study should be followed. Mr. Spencer stated that the City has the option of making adjustments to their recommendations.

Mr. Fuhs stated his belief that it was feasible to subsidize recreation fees but that taxpayers should not subsidize fees for developers.

Mr. Jones joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Kelleher stated that these costs would reflect actual costs.

Mr. Marmarou stated his belief that these fees are in line with other local municipalities and the City's actual costs.

Mr. Jones stated that a parking lot is still considered land development and undergoes the same process.

Mr. Waltman questioned why the fee is \$820 up to 50 spaces and then \$900 for every ten spaces thereafter.

Council requested clarification on this fee.

- Parks and Recreation Fee Increases

Mr. Marmarou questioned the use of the ball fields at Alvernia. He stated that these fields can be used after the NCAA season. He questioned where the application would be filed and who would receive the rental fee. Mr. Jones stated that the application would be filed with Matt Lubas. He stated that the fee situation is currently being negotiated.

Mr. Spencer questioned the exclusive use of the Egelman field by the East Reading AA. Mr. Jones stated that he is currently restructuring this agreement. He stated that East Reading currently has complete control of the field and receives all income; however, the City continues to maintain the park. He stated his belief that they should have preferred rights but not complete control.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her hope that additional public-private partnerships occur at parks throughout the City and noted the need for clear agreements. Mr. Jones stated that each agreement must be different as all parks are different.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that all the increases seem logical except for the use of the bandshell. She stated that many non-profit organizations may not be able to afford this new fee. Mr. Jones stated that he has made recommendations which are not reflected in this chart.

Ms. Kelleher questioned if there would be resident and non-resident fees. Mr. Jones replied negatively.

Mr. Marmarou and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the bandshell penalty. Mr. Jones stated that this would result from damages.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that the Pagoda Foundation should set the fee for the rental of the Pagoda. Mr. Jones suggested a graduated scale based on the amount of time used.

Mr. Sterner requested that Mr. Jones describe his recommended changes. Mr. Jones recommends the following changes:

- Small Pavilion – 6 hours - \$50
- Small Pavilion – 6+ hours - \$75
- Large Pavilion – 6 hours - \$100
- Large Pavilion – 6+ hours - \$125
- Bandshell – 6 hours \$400
- Ball field – 2 hours before 8 pm - \$20
- Ball field – 2 hours after 8 pm - \$30

Ms. Kelleher questioned if the lower fee could be for City residents and the Maximus recommended fee for non-residents. Mr. Jones agreed to use this approach for the pavilion rentals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed her support of taxpayers subsidizing the fee for City residents.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the Berks Arts Council paid the bandshell rental fee. Mr. Jones stated that they do not.

Mr. Jones stated his belief that the higher fees for use of the ball fields will decrease their usage. He stated that these lower fees would be for practices. He suggested an additional \$20 fee for lining, etc for games.

IV. Agenda Review

Council reviewed the agenda for this evening's meeting including:

- Resolution authorizing the City to be a member of the Berks County Cooperative Purchasing Council and appointing a representative and alternate to the Council

Mr. Spencer questioned if the Mayor and Managing Director would be the representative and alternate. Mr. Younger replied affirmatively.

Mr. Spencer questioned what this Council would be purchasing. Mr. Jones stated that they will be studying electricity rates and make recommendations for when rates caps are removed.

- Award of Contract for handicapped ramp installation

Mr. Sterner questioned how many ramps would be installed for this cost. Mr. Jones did not have a specific number but noted that this is a large project. He stated that it will be in northeast Reading.

Mr. Spencer stated that the City continues with these upgrades. Mr. Jones stated that the ADA states that the City must show that they are continuing the upgrades.

- Ordinance amending the Animal Control Ordinance regarding the reporting of animal bite incidents

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if this ordinance also includes the number of animals per household. Ms. Kelleher stated that this does not include that provision. It addresses the health code and will bring the City into compliance with the State bite quarantine procedure. She stated that the number of animals per household will be discussed at the upcoming work session.

- Resolution to apply for a Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) II grant to address foreclosures in the City

Ms. Kelleher stated that the consortium agreement has been amended and distributed copies of the amendment.

Mr. Spencer stated that the City did not receive NSP I funds. He questioned who would be preparing the application. Mr. Wright had left the meeting. Ms. Hemnitz will check with Mr. Mayes. She stated that the application is due this Thursday.

Mr. Fuhs stated that the consortium consists of the City, the Housing Authority, and Our City Reading. He questioned the rationale of including a private non-profit and questioned if there would be equal access to the funds. Mr. Younger stated that it would be determined by the terms of the agreement.

Mr. Fuhs questioned why Our City Reading was chosen over other non-profits and whether this should have an accompanying RFP. Mr. Younger stated that an RFP was not necessary.

Mr. Fuhs questioned the parameters used to determine that Our City Reading was the best choice for the consortium. Mr. Spencer stated his understanding that the Housing Authority and Our City Reading were chosen because of their involvement in housing issues.

Mr. Fuhs stated that Our City Reading has a positive balance sheet and that this may affect the outcome of the grant. Mr. Younger stated that the City is the lead applicant.

Mr. Waltman questioned why the City needs a consortium if they are in the lead.

Mr. Fuhs stated his belief that the City should be working on these issues and that partners may not be needed.

Mr. Fuhs stated that the Blighted Property Review Committee and the Redevelopment Authority have moved the City forward. This funding could assist the Blighted Property Review Committee and again questioned the involvement of Our City Reading.

Mr. Waltman stated that a member of the Administration should be present for this discussion with the deadline being this Thursday and action needed this evening.

Mr. Fuhs questioned if the City's congressional representatives are informed when the application is submitted.

- Resolution authorizing the City to file a proposal with DCED for funding of the position of Business Analyst

Mr. Spencer stated that Council requested this several years ago. He stated that a representative from DCED will be present at the upcoming work session. He suggested tabling this resolution until after further discussion. Ms. Kelleher also stated that there has been no response to Mr. Spencer's memo requesting further information.

Mr. Spencer stated that Council needs to know the ramifications of this resolution and how it would affect filing Act 47.

- Resolution supporting the Local Option Sales Tax/Property Tax Relief Act

Ms. Katzenmoyer distributed a copy of the resolution.

Mr. Fuhs stated that this legislation needs to be approved at the State level. He stated that if enacted the County Commissioners would need to act to participate. If the Commissioners do not take action, local municipalities can take action after twelve months.

Mr. Spencer stated that he has requested a copy of HB 1682 for review. He stated his belief that it may not pass at the State level.

Mr. Marmarou reminded Council that a percentage would be used to decrease property taxes.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that this was a tricky but viable option.

Mr. Sterner stated that this would increase the tax on all those spending money.

Mr. Fuhs stated that the two Republican Commissioners are not in favor of this tax.

Mr. Spencer stated that the City already does not collect enough in property taxes. He stated that this would further decrease that amount.

Mr. Waltman stated his belief that this is a tax shift. He stated that 40% would be new tax revenue but that he does not believe this is the solution. He stated that the City has systemic spending problems and that this will heighten the problems already in existence.

Mr. Fuhs stated that if the State passes the legislation, good debates will begin.

Mr. Spencer suggested tabling the resolution until further information is received.

V. Other Business

Mr. Fuhs informed Council of his work on transitional housing in the City. He stated that the Mayor agreed to address the issue jointly. The letter will request the District Attorney to review placement practices at these facilities. He questioned why a murderer was placed in Reading when we are battling crime problems. He stated that action needs to be taken in regards to these facilities.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the transitional housing should each deal with a different type of clientele. She stated her belief that better supervision is needed.

Council agreed to pursue this issue.

Mr. Marmarou stated that there are many more transitional houses in the City that are not permitted.

The meeting adjourned at 7:01 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC
City Clerk